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The Union of Central America

Speech delivered by Henry M. Hill in the School of Diplomacy and Jurisprudence of the American University, Washington, D. C.

By Henry M. Hill.

To the American People and the Government of the United States:

Today I publish the second of my series of articles which I intend to write with the purpose of establishing more friendly relations and a better understanding between the Latin American countries and the United States.

In these articles I show the more serious problems the United States has in the Central and South American countries, and give my opinion for the settlement of these problems. I have no interest in this matter other than love for my country and fellow-countrymen and my admiration for this great liberty-loving country, the land of the free and the home of the brave. No one is more friendly to the United States than I. Three-quarters of my blood is American—I feel proud of that. I was born under the American flag. At that time my father was the United States representative to my town, Santiago de Veraguas. As a child, my happiest moments were spent in the "atrio" of the old Colonial church, watching the American flag waving over my father's house, and dreaming that some day I might come to this great country and procure for my land a greater liberty, justice and comity. Three years ago, when the United States entered into the conflict for the freedom of humanity and called upon all its good sons for the defense of the flag, I resigned my position as Attorney General in my province, left my home and went to the American officers' training camp in Oakland, Cal., to prepare for the struggle in defense of Old Glory. This I did of my own free will. Many of my ancestors helped to lay the foundation of this nation by fighting for its liberty. Now I wish to see the American flag waving in all its glory in the hearts of the Latin American people.

My first article, "The Independence of Panama," was for the purpose of obliterating the false conception that Roosevelt took Panama, and to demonstrate that the United States has no reason whatever to indemnify Colombia because of the recognition of the Republic of Panama by the United States. My present article deals with the most important question in Latin America today, namely, the union of the Central American republics. In my next article I will discuss the treaty negotiated between the United States and Panama on November 18, 1903.

HENRY M. HILL.

Washington, January 1921.

To my dear friend of all times
Honorable Jose Lefevre, Minister of Panama
As a token of my Gratitude

H64

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By Henry M. Hill.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In September, 1921, the first centenary of the independence of Central America will be celebrated. On the 15th of that month, in 1821, the Spanish colonial Captaincy General of Guatemala (including what are now the five Central American republics, and the State of Chiapas, now for a long time a part of Mexico) declared its entire freedom from Spain and from any and all other countries of the world, constituting itself a new, free, autonomous and sovereign political entity. The United States of Central America became separate republics shortly after their independence, by reason of regional dissensions. Since then, through several periods of Central American history, a new Union has been striven and even fought for, but unsuccessfully owing to the opposition to it offered and maintained by the politico-military rulers of the various states, each jealous of the power of his brother presidents. It is, indirectly, to this splitting up of Central America, and, directly, to the petty politics that such a condition has made possible there, that the historian can trace every interstate war in Central America and also every revolution. Outside of Central America, the different governments composing it have not had, except very slightly, any participation as active belligerents in wars or revolutions elsewhere in the world. Their conflicts have been local. They have at least had the wisdom to make trouble only among themselves and to keep those troubles at home. In uniting, all those troubles will cease for them.

It may be very properly asked what has been the attitude, the will even, of the Central American people in this question of the Union. There is only one answer. The people of Central America have always desired the union of their little republics. This desire has been very solemnly stated in each and every constitution enacted in Central America, and by virtue of this ideal a citizen of any Central American country enjoys certain rights of citizenship in each other of those five republics which are very properly denied to citizens of other countries. For instance, a Nicaraguan may become a citizen of El Salvador merely by fixing his residence in El Salvador and stating his desire to become a Salvadorean; and, so naturalized, he becomes invested with every right inherent to a born citizen of El Salvador, even that of becoming, if so chosen, the Chief Executive of the State, just as a man born in California can fix his residence in North Dakota and be eligible to the Governship of this latter State. The Central American with relation to other Central Americans is that of a United States citizen of one State to the citizens of the other States of the Union. Because the vast majority of Central Americans earnestly desire the Union and know that a oneness of tradition, of history and of aspiration, a racial and religious oneness, pervades and animates them all.

Another pertinent question arises at this point. Why, if such has been and is the attitude and the will of the people, has the Union not been made a fact? We have already partly answered this question. The jealousies among the military presidents of the different Central American countries,

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the desire of each of these leaders to become himself the president of the Federation, the stubborn selfishness of each in not being willing to yield his power as president except to assume a greater similar power, have been the reason why the Union has not been made a fact.

Not until this year has Central America freed itself from that kind of enthroned ruler: dictatorships of many years' duration have been, until this day, the rule there. And these petty tyrants always gave as the great reason for their abstaining from the formation of one only Central American republic, the alleged opposition of the United States of America to that idea

The United States of America, the people of Central America were told, would not recognize the Central American Federation. All work for that ideal was, therefore, futile. The view thus readily gained ground that Washington was imperialistic minded, and preferred the diversion of Central America in order to absorb it, in the weakness of its division, all the more easily.

It is this explanation for every manner of American interference in Central America, and this only, that has bred in those ardent latitudes the unquestionable anti-American feeling existing there. This feeling is not unknown in the United States; it has been felt; it has been looked upon with apprehension; during the war with Germany, despite the fact that all of the Central American governments had either declared war with Germany or officially come out as neutrals, but favoring the United States, Central America was watched closely as a possible source of mischief.

On general grounds, is it at all desirable for a nation to have anywhere friends it cannot trust? More specifically, is it wise conduct for the United States to have so near its Canal (and consider all that the Canal can mean to the United States at war) a people living in hatred of the United States, a hatred that that people regard as righteous and patriotic? Is it not a fair thing and an advisable one—certainly a thing conducive to no embroilments anywhere—for the United States to show in a frank and noble manner its real attitude toward the Union of Central America, declaring conclusively that it will put up no obstacle to the consummation of the Central American Union desired by Central American patriotism?

Let this so easy a thing to be done, be done and Central Americans will have no reason for cherishing, as now they cherish, an anti-American sentiment. And I would say, do even more.

I have affirmed that not until this year has Central America been out of the direct control of selfish and ambitious petty rulers. Now, for the first time in Central American history, the presidents of Central America are men mindful of the constitutions of their countries and respectful of the will of the people they govern. The new President of Guatemala, Carlo Herrera, was acclaimed unanimously on a Unionist program. The President of El Salvador has recently invited the governments of the other Central American republics to a conference, this autumn, to discuss the Federation. All the Central American governments have responded to that invitation and have declared in favor of the Union. They cannot, they dare, not, declare otherwise. But the evil of the petty, selfish, secession-promoters is

not quite extinguished; its force is not altogether crushed; that evil works underhand; it is strong enough, through foxy political machinations, to make all Union efforts this fall mere sham and to bring the dishonor of a ridiculous defeat to the Union cause.

Small questions of no vital importance, of no material consequence, will arise to undo the higher purpose of that conference; questions such as where will the Capital City of the Federation be situated, in which of the States. And petty rivalries on this point will be fomented. Again, arguments against the Union will be brought forth based on the fear lest any one of the States become a Prussia to the others. And so, **ad infinitum**, the selfsame difficulties, the very troublous questions almost, that forces the founders of the United States to hold the Convention which framed the Constitution for this great country, behind closed doors.

What I would ask of the United States, therefore, is not only to state in unmistakable language that it has no objection to the proposed union of Central America, but that, on the contrary, it earnestly invites the Central American conference to sit in Washington (where a similar conference, that which established the Central American Peace Court, sat in 1908). Here the Central American statesmen, foregathered to discuss the Union of their countries, will find that freedom from local clamor and pressure and that calm that Washington and his fellow-makers of this Union sought behind closed doors; and here, too, American advice and help, the guidance of a sincere, experienced elder brother, will be at that conference's disposal when and if solicited in the course of the settlement of any question that may arise to puzzle the conference.

The time is now. The aid proposed, of the United States to the people of Central America, cannot be a nobler one. Of the material benefits that would accrue from this to American business and industry in Central America, it is unnecessary to speak. Besides, it is precisely in the United States that the financial aspect of the Central American Federation, the distribution or consolidation of the existing Central American foreign debts, must be settled. Born, as it were, from the loins of the United States in Dionysiac fashion, the new Federation of Central America cannot but be in a very high sense a child of this country. Central Americans will honor that parentage.

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